

PART VI

LIVESTOCK, DAIRYING AND POULTRY

General Importance

Livestock and livestock products have played an important part in Whatcom County's agricultural economy since pioneer days. The dairy, beef cattle, and poultry farming enterprises have become the primary agricultural activity of the county. In the Nooksack River Plains are located some of the finest dairy and pasture lands of the state.

Census of Agriculture data indicate that in 1959 about 82 percent of all farm products sold, in terms of cash returns to Whatcom County farmers, were derived from livestock and livestock products. The value of all animals and their products marketed was \$17,706,625. Dairy products alone made up over 52 percent of the county's commercial farm sales. In 1959, Whatcom ranked first among Washington counties in the number of milk cows and in value of dairy products sold. In addition, the county's poultry industry ranked first in the number of chickens, first in the number of eggs sold, and second in the value of poultry products sold

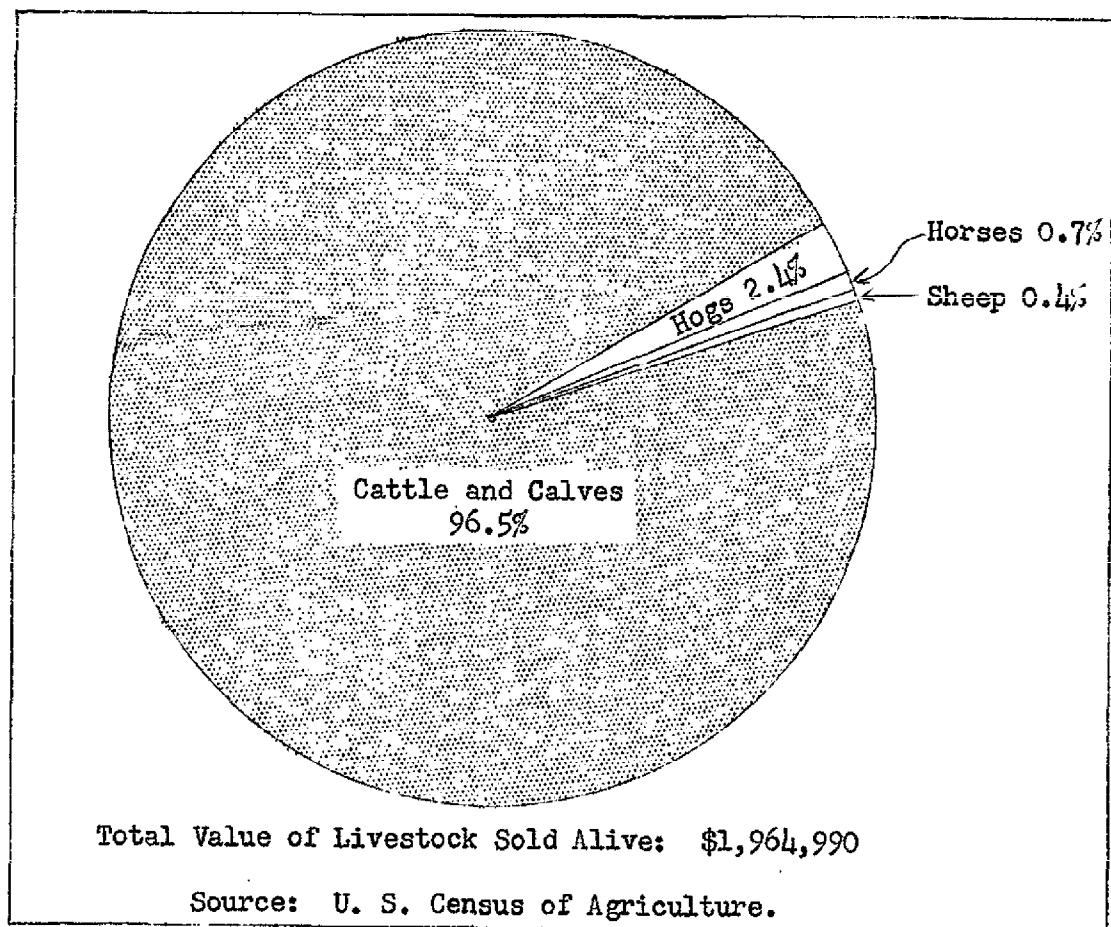


Figure 11. Value of Livestock Sold Alive
Whatcom County, 1959

Livestock Trends

Significant changes have occurred in livestock farming in Whatcom County since 1940. The value of livestock and animal products sold off farms increased from \$4,143,681 in 1940 to \$17,706,625 in 1959. There were net gains in beef and dairy cattle from 1940 to 1959. The number of chickens in the county increased during World War II, dropped in the immediate post-war period, but has trended upward since then. Animals which have dropped in population in recent years include horses, hogs, and sheep. Changes also occurred in the county's production of dairy and poultry products. Farm sales of whole milk have continued to surge upward while the amount of cream sold has been reduced considerably. Egg sales off the farm have increased greatly in recent years.

Cattle: Beef and Dairy Farming

Cattle, including both dairy and beef animals, are the most valuable items in Whatcom County agriculture. Dairying is well-adapted to the climatic and topographic conditions of the county and dairy farms have continued to dominate the livestock enterprise. Cattle do well on the area's cleared meadows, woodland pasture, logged-over land, and grasslands on the rougher terrain. Both milk and beef cattle numbers have been on the increase in recent years. Improvements in quality and more efficient husbandry practices have been important factors contributing toward this increase.

Table 26. Livestock Numbers on Farms
Whatcom County, 1939-1963

Year	All Cattle (head)	Beef Cattle (head)	Dairy Cattle (head)
1939	49,900	3,300	46,600
1940	50,600	3,500	47,100
1941	53,400	1,400	52,000
1942	56,500	2,000	54,500
1943	60,500	3,000	57,500
1944	62,000	1,500	60,500
1945	61,000	1,500	59,500
1946	59,900	1,600	58,300
1947	59,000	1,500	57,500
1948	58,800	2,700	56,100
1949	59,000	2,800	56,200
1950	58,500	2,500	56,000
1951	58,000	3,200	54,800
1952	59,500	7,400	52,100
1953	68,100	14,000	54,100
1954	70,200	11,500	58,700
1955	72,000	10,400	61,600
1956	71,000	9,200	61,800
1957	65,000	5,300	59,700
1958	63,700	5,000	58,700
1959	69,000	9,300	59,700
1960	70,900	9,200	61,700
1961	77,000	12,400	64,600
1962	81,000	13,400	67,600
1963	85,000	19,300	65,700

Source: Statistical Reporting Service, U.S.D.A.

Although the cattle population has been on an upward trend since 1939, the increase has not been steady. The number of cattle has fluctuated with an increase during World War II, a drop in the immediate post-war years, an upward trend during the early 1950's, a decrease in the late 1950's, and finally a rise toward a record high in 1963.

The number of beef cattle in the county was relatively low until the early 1950's. In 1953, 14,000 head was estimated for the county but by 1958 the number was down to around 5,000 head. After 1958, however, the beef cattle population rose almost steadily to the record high of 19,300 head in 1963. Beef cattle accounted for almost 23 percent of the county's total cattle numbers in 1963. Some of the reasons for the shift to beef animals on some farms are the costs in meeting Grade A milk standards, the relatively low profit to effort ratio in dairying, and the smaller expenditures for facilities and equipment necessary for beef cattle production.

Whatcom is Washington's leading dairy county. According to the Census of 1959, the county ranked 63rd in the nation in the number of milk cows on farms. In 1963 Whatcom, with 42,900 head of milk cows, accounted for about 16 percent of the state total. Over the last quarter century, the trend in dairy cattle number has been upward, from around 46,600 head in 1939 to 65,700 head in 1963. The 1963 county figure represented about 16 percent of the state's dairy cattle population. A record high of 67,000 head was reached in 1962 in the county.

Since 1920, the sale of whole milk from Whatcom County dairy farms has greatly increased while the selling of cream has markedly decreased. Good market conditions during World War II gave a strong impetus to dairy products. Census figures for 1944 recorded 224,526,082 pounds of whole milk sold from dairy farms. Cream sales reached 86,272 pounds during the same year. Since then, cream sold off the farms decreased to around 33,320 pounds in 1959. Whole milk sales also declined for a short period after World War II but have been on an upward trend since 1949.

Table 27. Dairy Products Sold From Farms
Whatcom County, 1940-1959

Year	Any Milk or Cream Sold	Whole Milk Sold	Cream Sold
	(dollars)	(pounds)	(pounds)
1940	No data	146,924,068	668,501
1944	No data	224,526,082	86,272
1949	7,206,937	205,584,467	88,804
1954	8,497,727	226,751,057	27,476
1959	11,373,495	286,697,670	33,320

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture

Farms reporting sales of whole milk declined over 52 percent from 1949 to 1959--from 3,469 to 1,647. Farms which sold cream numbered well over 400 prior to World War II but by 1959 were down to 20. Dairy specialty farms, which numbered 1,750 in the county in 1950, dropped to 1,170 in 1959. Increasing costs in recent years have resulted in a trend toward fewer but larger, more efficient dairy operations.

Cattle are located mainly in the northwestern part of Whatcom County. With mountainous terrain and heavy forest, eastern Whatcom County has few or no cattle. Most of the dairy and beef cattle are concentrated in the middle Nooksack Valley between Ferndale and Everson--centering on Lynden. The great majority of pasture and range use in the county is on private land.

Poultry Farming

Whatcom is one of the leading counties in Washington in the production of poultry and poultry products. Sales of poultry and poultry products from Whatcom County farms decreased after World War II from \$4,366,788 in 1944 to \$3,613,726 in 1954 but increased to \$4,364,948 in 1959. Chickens sold numbered 1,104,143 birds in 1954 compared with 1,317,682 birds in 1959. Eggs sold off the farms increased from 6,273,370 dozen in 1954 to 10,508,089 dozen in 1959. Among Washington counties, Whatcom ranked fifth in number of chickens sold and was first in eggs sold for 1959.

Although Whatcom County's poultry industry has increased in production and sales in recent years, the number of farms involved has decreased. Farms specializing in poultry in the county totaled 668 in 1950 compared with 257 in 1959. The total number of farms which sold any poultry and/or poultry products also declined during this period from 1,790 to 603. Small farm flocks are becoming nonexistent. The current trend is toward larger commercial flocks and specialized poultry farms referred to as "egg factories".

Table 28. Chickens, Egg Production and Turkeys
Whatcom County, 1939-1959

Year	Chickens 1/		Egg Production		Turkeys raised (birds)
	Birds	Number of Farms	Number of Farms	Dozens of Eggs	
1939	645,880	3,233	3,063	7,344,259 2/	4,827
1944	810,131	3,615	3,516	9,568,574 2/	7,927
1949	499,392	2,684	1,641	6,764,311 3/	10,806
1954	551,818	1,972	1,078	6,273,370 3/	57,429
1959	774,935	912	531	10,508,089 3/	84

1/ 4 months and over. 2/ Eggs produced. 3/ Eggs sold.

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

In the past, poultry meat was a by-product of egg production. Now it has become an important product in its own right. In 1959, 832,218 broilers were sold off 28 Whatcom County farms. Other chickens sold numbered 485,464 and were reported by 467 farms.

Whatcom County's turkey production is insignificant. Only 84 birds were reported in 1959 by 11 farms. Turkey numbers have greatly declined in recent years. Over 57,000 birds were recorded by the Census of Agriculture in 1954.

Hogs

Hogs have decreased in number in Whatcom County since 1920. The 1920 Census enumerated 6,395 hogs, pigs, and sows on Whatcom County farms, whereas 1,541 head were recorded in 1959. This reduction in numbers has been a result of changes in

farming practices and a shift from general to more specialized farming. Compared with 1920, fewer farmers raise hogs for on-farm slaughter and home use as fresh and cured meats. The use of land for grain feed and the diversion of skim milk and other by-products to produce hogs for market has been found less profitable than dairy and beef cattle raising in the county.

The distribution of hogs is fairly scattered in the Nooksack Valley. Hogs are raised in small herds. In 1959, 1,541 farms reported raising hogs and pigs.

Table 29. Hogs, Horses and Mules
Whatcom County, 1939-1959

Year	Hogs and Pigs		Horses and Mules	
	Number of Farms	Head	Number of Farms	Head
1939	796	2,849	1,899	3,941
1944	753	3,065	1,559	3,086
1949	580	2,664	925	1,810
1954	364	1,572	502	1,010
1959	305	1,541	423	1,095

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Horses and Mules

The number of horses and mules in Whatcom County has declined greatly since 1920 as the need for work and draft animals decreased in the wake of farm mechanization. In 1920, there were 5,238 horses and mules on farms and in 1959 there were 1,095 head.

Sheep

Sheep raising is a minor part of Whatcom County livestock farming. In 1959, 71 farms reported a total of 1,126 sheep and lambs in the county. All farm flocks in the county were under 300 head in that year. About 7,786 pounds of wool were shorn from 876 sheep on 53 farms in 1959.

Table 30. Sheep, Lambs and Wool Shorn
Whatcom County, 1939-1959

Year	Sheep and Lambs		Wool Shorn	
	Number of Farms	Head	Number of Farms	Pounds of Wool
1939	73	969	54	5,655
1944	81	1,110	45	4,704
1949	67	1,254	44	4,747
1954	113	1,719	74	10,047
1959	71	1,126	53	7,786

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.